

NAIROBI EVANGELICAL GRADUATE SCHOOL OF  
THEOLOGY

SERIAL VERB CONSTRUCTIONS IN YORUBA

BY

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NAIROBI EVANGELICAL GRADUATE SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY

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BY  
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A Linguistics Project submitted to the Graduate School  
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of Master of Arts in Translation Studies

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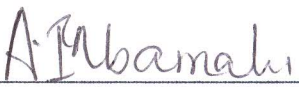
## Student's Declaration

### Serial Verb Constructions in Yoruba

I declare that this is my original work and has not been submitted to any other  
College or University for academic credit.

The views presented herein are not necessarily those of the Nairobi Evangelical  
Graduate School of Theology or the Examiners

(signed)

  
Abiola Mbamalu

July, 2000

To

Mary-Ann Augustine

Robin Holmes

Stewart Johnson

and Ronnie Sim

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

cont	'Continuative'
comp	'Completive'
cop	'Copula'
foc	'Focus'
fut	'Future Marker'
hab	'Habitual aspect marker'
loc	'Locative'
neg	'Negative'
N	'Noun'
NP	'Noun Phrase'
P	'Preposition'
Pl	'Plural'
PP	'Prepositional Phrase'
Q	'Question Marker'
SVC	'Serial verb construction'
T /M/A	'Tense /Mood/ Aspect'
VP	'Verb Phrase'
Vst	'Verb stem'
1 sing	'1st person singular'
2 sing	'2nd person singular'
3 sing	'3rd person singular'
3 pl	'3rd person plural'

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Yoruba refers both to an ethnic group that inhabits the south-western part of Nigeria and to the language being spoken by the group. In this work, reference will be made to the language more often than to the people.

#### The People

Yoruba is the mother-tongue of the inhabitants of south-western Nigeria, a people that number 18,850,000 which is about 20.3% of the total Nigerian population. Yoruba speakers are also found in Togo and the Republic of Benin, thereby bringing the total number of Yoruba speakers to at least 20 million (Grimes 1996).

#### Language Classification

Yoruba belongs to Africa's largest language family : Niger-Congo. Its sub-division is Yoruboid from Defoid division of Benue-Congo sub-family. In the same division is Akokoid (Williamson 1989). Edoid and Igboid sub-divisions are closely related too (Capo 1989).

### **Dialect**

There are about twenty dialects of Yoruba with varying degrees of closeness to the central dialect : Oyo. Notable dialects include: Ijesa, Ila, Ijebu, Ondo, Owo, Ekiti, Ilaje, Ikale, Awori, Bini, Aworo, Egba, Akono, Gbedde, Yagba, Igbena, Iworro, Jumu, and Owe. Each of these dialects roughly correspond to a particular dominant sub-ethnic group.

### **Language Use**

Yoruba is used extensively in inter-personal communication for sentimental purposes, at traditional ceremonies and trading which involve Yoruba-speaking partners. Yoruba is also used as the language of instruction in the first three years of primary education (in the south-western part of the country) in line with the Nigerian government policy on mother-tongue education. It is taught as a subject both at the primary and secondary levels of education. Quite a number of Nigerian universities offer undergraduate and post graduate studies in Yoruba. A great number of books (including the complete Bible), articles, newspapers and magazines are available in the language and about the language. A lot of programs are broadcast on television and radio stations in the south-western part of the country.

### **Features of the Yoruba Language**

Yoruba is a head first marking language and employs the SVO word order typology. In terms of morphology, it is an isolating language so that morphological derivations are quite minimal. It is no wonder then that serial verb constructions (SVCs) should be replete in the language.

In terms of form, Yoruba acknowledges three tones and two tones are marked:

high tone ´ , low tone ` , while the mid tone is usually unmarked in the orthography. In this work I have decided to mark tones only when it helps to clarify the difference in the meaning of words that otherwise have the same form. To this end therefore, I have marked the mid tone as ¨.

### Sources of Data

The data used in this work is based on the Oyo dialect provided sometimes by this writer who has been speaking the language for more than thirty years. Some data are culled from some magazines, newspapers and articles written in the language.

### Previous Work

A lot of work has been done both on this topic and the language. Among the works done on the topic is The Syntax of Serial Verbs by Mark Sebba which I have found quite helpful and to which I have made reference , When Verbs Collide: Papers from the 1990 Ohio State Mini-Conference on Serial Verbs edited by Joseph, B.D. and Zwicky, A.M. In addition are articles by Ayo Bamgbose on the topic as well as on the language like "Issues in the Analysis of Serial Verb Construction" which I have found quite stimulating and to which I have made reference in this paper. "The Modifying Serial Construction: a Critique" by Awobuluyi, Oladele is another work done on the language and the topic. Indeed, it is not possible to exhaust all the works done either on the language or on the topic.

### **Statement of Topic**

In a class of nine, I found that I was the only one with a language that has serial verb constructions. This was the starting point of the writing of this paper, for it provoked me to study the peculiarity of this phenomenon.

### **Significance of Topic**

The significance of this topic lies in the fact that what other languages choose to state using prepositions or adverbs or conjunctions, Yoruba sometimes chooses to express with verbs. How this is achieved and the reason for choosing serial verb constructions to express a proposition or propositions and not any other alternative are part of the issues this paper seeks to address. The phenomenon of SVCs raises a lot of pertinent questions as to the nature of the verbs involved, the semantic make-up of the propositions and its resulting syntactic structures.

### **Sketch of Contents**

In chapter two of this work, I shall describe the verbs in Yoruba in terms of morphology, syntax and semantics. A means of ascertaining the verbness of any string of words shall be devised. Chapter three shall deal with the description of serial verb constructions in Yoruba with regard to its syntax and semantics. The main issue of my discussion will be whether SVCs contain co-ordinate or subordinate structures. My claim will be that both kinds of structures are found in Yoruba SVCs although subordinating SVCs are more prevalent. In Chapter four I shall explore the role of serial verb constructions in Yoruba discourse. In addition, the pragmatic dimensions of serial

verb constructions in Yoruba shall be explored. Chapter five shall be the conclusion of all the chapters and an assessment on how far I have achieved what I set out to do shall be discussed and areas for further research shall be identified.

### Orthography Used

I have decided to use the orthography that is currently in use in Yoruba literature. It is quite different from the International Phonetic Alphabet ( IPA ) in a number of ways:

Yoruba Orthography	IPA
p	[kp]
ṣ	[ʃ]
o	[ɔ]
e	[ɛ]
j	[dʒ]
y	[j]
r	[ɹ]

## CHAPTER 2

### DESCRIPTION OF VERBS IN YORUBA

#### Morphology

Yoruba is an isolating language. A verb ( in Yoruba) consists only of the verb stem. Therefore it is impossible to establish different verb classes on the basis of morphology.

V → V stem

#### Syntax

##### Simple Clause

A simple sentence in Yoruba is made up of a noun phrase in the subject position followed by an optional tense or mood or aspect marker. When T/ M/ A is not indicated, that is  $\phi$ , past tense is meant. In Yoruba, the only tense marker is future yo. An ongoing or present action is usually indicated by a continuative aspect marker n. Yoruba also has completive and habitual aspect markers. It is however possible to have two aspect markers in a sentence, for instance a completive marker followed by a continuative marker or a habitual marker followed by a completive. It is also possible to have the future marker followed by a habitual or completive marker. Sometimes a mood marker can co-occur with the habitual or completive aspect marker. These in turn are followed by the verb and then the object and or a prepositional phrase. For the purpose of this work, a simple sentence shall be assumed to have an optional T/M/A.

S → NP (T) (M) (A) VP

VP → V (NP) (PP)\*

\* Any number

For example :

1. Mo n lo si oko.

I cont. go to farm

'I am going to the farm'.

2. Mama mi ti fo aṣo na.

Mother my comp wash cloth the

'My mother has washed the clothes.'

## Negation

### Sentential Negation

A sentence is usually negated in a clause by placing the negative marker in front of the verb. If T/ M/ A is marked in the sentence, the negative marker usually precedes it. For instance :

3. Tunde ko ti fo awo.

prop.N neg comp break plate

'Tunde has not broken the plate'.



### Constituent Negation

In order to negate a constituent as for instance in contrastive focus, another variant of the negative marker followed by a focus marker is placed following the constituent in its scope.

4. Tunde      kọ      ni      o      fọ́      awo.

Prop.N      neg      foc      3sing      break      plate

'It was not Tunde that broke the plate.'

### Topicalization

In order to focus on the verb, as in the case of a Wh- focus or a contrastive focus, the verb undergoes a reduplication and is fronted followed by a focus marker, while its unreduplicated form remains in its usual position as in :

5. Fífó      ni      Tunde      fọ́      awo      na.

Breaking      foc      Prop.N      break      plate      the

'It was breaking that Tunde did to the plate'. / 'Tunde did break the plate'.

### Transitivity

#### Intransitive

A simple clause containing an intransitive verb in Yoruba can have this form :

Cl → NP (T) (M) (A) VP

VP → V stem

- 6) Taye ti sun.  
 Taye comp sleep  
 'Taye has slept.'

### Transitive

A sentence containing a transitive verb in Yoruba can have this form :

S → NP (T) (M) (A) VP

VP → V (NP) (PP)

- 7) Taye jẹ ewa  
 Prop.N eat beans  
 'Taye ate beans.'

### Ditransitive

A sentence containing a ditransitive verb in Yoruba can have this form :

S → NP (T) (M) (A) VP

VP → V NP NP

- 8) Taye fun mi l' aṣọ  
 Prop.N give me cop.dress  
 'Taye gave me a dress.'

## The Semantics of Yoruba Verbs

In terms of semantics, Yoruba verbs as in any language indicate the action, process, state, attribute, or experience that is being performed or undergone by the subject of the clause as the examples above have shown. However verbs in a serial construction do not necessarily perform these functions, their roles may be very different from what one observes in a simple sentence. The next chapter will shed light on this.

## CHAPTER 3

### SERIAL VERB CONSTRUCTIONS IN YORUBA

#### Introduction

##### Traditional Views on Serial Verb Constructions

According to Carol Lord (1974), as quoted by Lawal, a serial verb construction is:

A construction in which the verbs all refer to subparts or aspects of a single overall event. The action or state denoted by the second verb is in terms of the real world an outgrowth of the action denoted by the first verb--- the second verb represents a further development, consequence, result, goal or culmination of the action by the first verb.( Lawal 1989, 5).

However, according to Thomas Payne : “A serial verb construction contains two or more verb roots that are neither compounded nor members of separate clauses”. (Payne 1997, 307).

#### Problem

The traditional views do not cover all the facts in Yoruba. For instance, while Payne’s definition is broad enough to accommodate all the different types of occurrences of SVCs, it is not explicit enough for our purposes here. Although Lord’s definition tries to be explicit, it fails to capture some occurrences of Yoruba SVC. For instance, it is possible to have more than two verbs in a Yoruba SVC as in:

(10) Ogunlọgọ ọmọ Yoruba ńo ti sa pada wa `le

Several child Yoruba foc3sing comp run return come home

'A great number of the Yoruba people have escaped home.'

(11) Mo n lo ra ounje je

I cont go buy food eat

'I am going to buy food to eat'.

(12) Emi yo lo wa ise miran se

I fut go look work other do

'I shall look for another job.'

In addition to this is the fact that Lord's definition fails to capture some SVCs, the verbs of which neither denote aspects of an overall action nor indicate a further development or consequence of the action of the first verb. For instance:

(13) Taye ko owo je ni enu ise

Taye gather money eat loc mouth work

'Taye embezzled funds at work'.

This is an idiomatic expression which cannot be understood by simply analyzing the meaning of each verb.

### Definition of SVC in Yoruba

The above-mentioned examples already indicate an evidence for SVCs in Yoruba. In attempting a definition of SVC in Yoruba, the following features have been found quite characteristic:

- There is no independent marking of the subject of non-initial verbs.
- Tense /aspect / mood is marked only on the first verb.
- The intonation is characteristic of a single clause.
- Negation is marked only on the first verb.
- The verbs share the same arguments ; they may have the same subject and object or the object of the first verb becomes the subject of a subsequent verb.
- Neither conjunctions nor complementizers are used in these constructions.
- There are no overt markers of coordination or subordination.

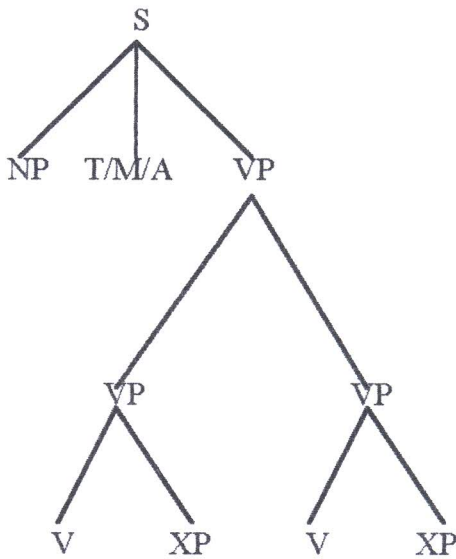
In addition to these features, a serial verb construction in Yoruba may be defined as a construction where two or more verbs are used to state an action or actions or an action and the manner in which the action was done.

### The Syntax of SVC

#### Traditional Views on SVC

Sebba (1987) in a syntactic analysis of serialization recognizes two forms namely, coordinating and subordinating serial constructions. A construction that refers to several actions, more or less simultaneously he calls a coordinating serial construction ( p.109). In addition, he says that such a construction is subject to the Coordinate Structure constraint proposed by Ross, that is, the NP behind any of the verbs cannot be moved

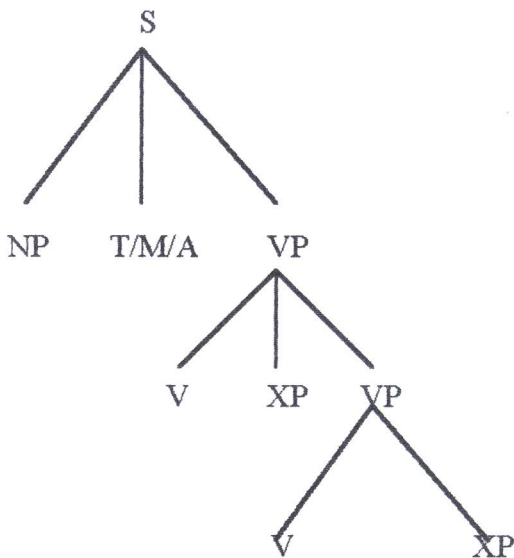
## Coordinating Serial Construction :



(where X is N or P)

He describes the subordinating serial construction as one which refers to a single action rather than a series of related actions although it has two or more verbs. He acknowledges the fact that the action may involve a series of motions, but there is no possibility of a temporal break between them. In addition, he affirms that there is a strict ordering relationship between the verbs (p.112).

## Subordinating Serial Construction (where X is N or P) :



### The Syntax and Semantics of Yoruba SVC

In order to justify particular syntactic analyses in Yoruba, we have to consider first the word order in Yoruba SVC, the semantic function of some Yoruba SVCs, the status of some Yoruba verbs (full verbs or not) and the function of negation.

#### Word Order in Yoruba SVC

The order in which verbs occur in a Yoruba SVC matters, as Awobuluyi (1973) observes, quoted by Lawal:

The order in which verbs occur in serial verbal sentences is significant. In some cases a reversal of that order brings about a change in meaning. In other cases, a reversal of the order produces nonsensical utterances. (Lawal 1989, 8).

This is one reason why the position of occurrence of a verb in a SVC is important.

Being in initial position may give it a different meaning from when it is in a medial or final position. For instance:

- (14) Awọ̀n Abọ̀de            Kano ọ̀hun ti        ya    wọ    ilu  
 Pl.    returnee            Kano    that    comp    flood    enter    city  
 ‘Those returnees from Kano had flooded the city.’

- (15) \*Awọ̀n Abọ̀de            Kano ọ̀hun ti        wọ    ya    ilu  
 Pl        returnee            Kano    that    comp    enter    flood    city  
 ‘The returnees from Kano had entered torn the city.’

(15) is an example of what Awobuluyi would refer to as a nonsensical utterance for it

does not make sense to the hearer because ya in this position has the meaning 'to tear'.

- (16) Taye n sare jeun  
 Taye cont run eat.something  
 'Taye is eating quickly.'

- (17) Taye n jeun sare  
 Taye cont eat.something run  
 'Taye is eating while running.'

While (16) tells one the manner in which Taye is eating, (17) could best be understood as two actions taking place concurrently .

### Semantic Functions of Some Yoruba SVCs

#### Verbs of Motion

Verbs of motion like lo 'go', sare 'run', wa /bo 'come', rin 'walk', fo 'fly /jump' are a continual source of SVC in Yoruba for two of them can co-occur to indicate manner or direction.

Sare 'run' in initial position functions like an English adverb

- (18) Mo n sare lo si ile  
 I cont run go to house  
 'I am going home quickly.'



(19) Tayo n sare jeun

Tayo cont run eat.something

‘Tayo is eating quickly.’

Verb of motion as second verb as directional marker

(20) Eye<sub>i</sub> na ti fo lo

Bird the compl fly/jump go

‘The bird has flown away.’

Lo in the clause above is one clue apart from one’s knowledge of the nature of birds to determine the meaning of fo as fly and not as jump.

(21) Eye<sub>i</sub> na ti fo soke

Bird the compl jump /fly loc.up

‘The bird has flown up.’

Comparison of examples 20 and 21 makes one appreciate lo as a marker of direction away from a discourse-defined point of reference, which usually is the speaker. While Example 22 also sees lo basically as a direction marker it has a connotation that is more than this.

(22) Om<sub>o</sub> na ti rin lo

Child the compl walk away

‘The child has wandered away.’

Apart from stating that the direction of the child’s walk was away from the speaker or

observer, it could hint at the possibility of the child being missing.

Wa / B<sub>o</sub>. At this juncture, it might be pertinent to mention wa' and what Stahlke calls its suppletive b<sub>o</sub>, both of which mean 'to come' (1970 80- 81) . Wa' can occur with future marker, completive aspect marker,  $\phi$ , and mood markers while b<sub>o</sub> , occurs only with the continuative marker. This does not suggest that each always occurs independently of the other as example 25 will show. The significance of this phenomenon lies in the fact that since tense/ mood/ aspect is marked once in a SVC, the choice of verb to be used (that is either wa or b<sub>o</sub> ) will be determined by agreement with the tense or else an ungrammatical string results. For instance:

- (23) Tunde      wa    si      'le  
 Tunde      come to      house  
 'Tunde came home'.
- (24) Tunde      n      b<sub>o</sub>      l'ona  
 Tunde      cont    come loc.way  
 'Tunde is on the way'. Or 'Tunde is coming'.
- (25) Tunde      n      b<sub>o</sub>      wa    si      'le  
 Tunde      cont    come come to      house  
 'Tunde is coming home'

Comparison of examples 23 and 25 shows the interdependence between the two verbs, for while wa cannot be used to indicate present tense, bó is so limited in use that it cannot occur on its own in example 25 where it acts like an aspect marker, so that we have a SVC in (25).

**Fun 'to give' in non-initial position as dative marker**

Fun as a verb in a simple clause usually precedes the indirect object, thus indicating the indirect object as the recipient or benefactor of the direct object (see example 8). The occurrence of fun in a non-initial position in a SVC causes it to act more like an English preposition as in :

(26) Baba mi fẹ iyawo fun mi

Father my marry wife give me

'My father procured a wife for me.'

(27) Tayo ti tu aṣiri re fun mi

Tayo compl open secret your give me

'Tayo has revealed your secrets to me.'

(28) Tunde ni o so fun mi

Tunde foc 3sing talk give me

'It was Tunde who told me.'

**Fi 'to use' in initial position as an instrumental marker or adverb of manner**

Fi in the verb initial position is a frequent source for SVCs in Yoruba. In a simple sentence it has the meaning 'to put' as in :

- (29) Taye n fi eti si`le  
 Taye cont put ear loc.ground  
 'Taye is listening.'

- (30) Tunde fi mi si`le  
 Tunde put me loc.ground  
 'Tunde left me.'

In a SVC, fi 'to use' appears as an instrumental marker, for example :

- (31) Mo fi oḃe ge iṣu  
 I use knife cut yam  
 'I cut yam with a knife.'

- (32) Kaka ki o fi suuru s' alaye fun mi --  
 Instead that 3sing use patience do.explanation give me  
 'Instead of explaining patiently to me.'

- (33) Iroyin fi ye wa wipe ; -----  
 News use understand us talk; -----  
 'News made us understand that -----.' OR  
 'We understood from the news that-----.'

Fi as a marker of adverb of manner:

- (34) Gbenga fi oḃon yanju oṛo na.  
 Gbenga use wisdom settle word the  
 'Gbenga settled the matter wisely.'

- (35) O fi irele ba mi so 'ro  
 3sing use humility accompany me talk word  
 'He talked respectfully with me'.

**Ju 'to surpass' in second position as a comparative marker.**

Ju is a verb with limited use. It is used generally as a comparative and superlative marker. It is usually followed by lo 'go' in a SVC, the position of lo indicates its use as a comparative or superlative marker. When lo directly follows ju without any intervening item, it is serving as a superlative marker. I must however add that there are times when only ju is used but the context enables one to identify the use as superlative. When lo directly follows any intervening item after ju then it is acting as a comparative marker. In this work I am treating ju as a second verb for I am taking the string of words preceding it as a stative verb instead of an adjective for it satisfies all the conditions of verbness in Yoruba in terms of topicalization, word order and negation as enumerated in the last chapter. For example:

topicalization

- (36) Wiwuwo ni omọ na wuwo.  
 being heavy foc child the heavy  
 'The child is really heavy'.

Its syntax and occurrence as the only verb in a sentence.

- (37) O<sub>ṛ</sub>mo na n wuwo si lojojumo  
 Child the cont heavy in addition everyday  
 ‘The child is getting heavier everyday’.

As a comparative marker, we can have the following example :

- (38) Igi na wuwo ju irin lo  
 Tree the heavy surpass iron go  
 ‘The tree is heavier than an iron.’

As a superlative marker, we can have :

- (39) Dupe lo gbon ju (lo) ninu awon metata  
 Dupe, foc.3sing wise. surpass (go) loc.stomach pl three  
 ‘Dupe is the wisest among the three’.

Indeed, it is sufficient to indicate comparison with the use of ju and lo without specifying the relationship, which can be done in context as in :

- (40) O ju mi lo  
 3sing surpass me go  
 ‘He surpasses me’.

### SVCs as Idiomatic Expressions

The occurrence of some verbs in SVCs with idiomatic interpretation suggest that the meaning is not the composition of the literal meaning of each verb as in :

- (41) Taju fa oju ro  
 Taju pull eye squeeze  
 'Taju frowned'.

- (42) Lojiji ni Bankole gba ina je.  
 Suddenly foc Bankole accept fire eat  
 'Bankole suddenly got furious'.

- (43) E tu oju ka.  
 Pl open eye scatter  
 'Be cheerful'.

Example 13 is also in this category.

### Full Verbs or Not

The ability to function as verbs in a simple sentence has often been considered crucial for the determination of any string of words in a construction as SVCs. In a simple sentence, tense, mood or aspect (T/ M/ A) usually precede the verb stem. In a SVC the first verb is normally preceded by T/ M /A. For example:

- (44) Taye ti lo gbe ijoko wa.  
 Taye comp go carry seat come  
 'Taye has gone to bring a seat.'

### Topicalization

This is also one of the means to determine the verbal quality of some strings of words. That is, it must be possible to topicalize the verb (cf. example 5). In a SVC it is the first verb that gets topicalized. In the strict sense, topicalization is a kind of fronted copying of the verb which stays in its usual position, for example :

- (45) Fifun    nī    o    fun    mi    ní    aṣọ    na  
       Giving    foc    3sing    give    me    loc.    cloth    the  
       ‘He    indeed    gave    me    the    cloth.’

Problem: In the light of these, there are some strings of words which I found difficult to describe, for instance, bá which may be glossed ‘accompany’ (pointed out by Ayo

Bamgbose 1982). Bá occurs in a Yoruba SVC, for instance:

- (46)    Taye    bá            mi    ra    ẹran    bọ.  
       Taye    accompany    me    buy    meat    come  
       ‘Taye    bought    meat    for    me.’

- (47)    Olu            n            bá            mi    lọ.  
       Olu            cont            accompany    me    go  
       ‘Olu    is    going    with    me.’

Bá in example 46 is acting as benefactive marker while bá in example 47 is comitative.

Just as any verb could be preceded by T / M / A or negated so we can have :



(48) Taye yo bá mi ra ɛran bọ.

Taye fut. accompany me buy meat come

‘Taye will buy meat for me.’

(49) Taye ko bá mi ra ɛran bọ.

Taye neg accompany me buy meat come

‘Taye did not buy meat for me.’

(50) Olu ko ba mi lọ.

Olu neg accompany me go

‘Olu is not going with me.’

However, one cannot topicalize bá in example 46 ; it would be an ungrammatical string:

(51) \*Biba ni Taye bá mi ra ɛran bọ

Topic foc. Taye accompany me buy meat come.

‘It is accompanying that Taye accompany me buy meat’

Topicalizing bá in example 47 is however acceptable:

(52) Biba ni Olu n ba mi lọ.

Topic foc Olu cont accompany me go

‘It is accompanying that Olu is accompanying me’ OR

‘It is going that Olu is going with me.’

In addition to this is the fact that bá does not occur as the only verb in a non-SVC. One must add quickly that there is another bá’ which has the same form as the one under

discussion ( 'has only been added by me to distinguish it from the other one) and has all the qualities of a verb, for instance, it occurs as the only verb in a simple sentence as in (53), accommodates negation as in (54), can be topicalized as in (55) and accommodates T/ M/ A as in (56).

- (53) Taye     ba'     mi     ni     `le  
           Taye     meet me     loc.     house  
           'Taye     met     me     in     the     house'.
- (54) Taye     ko     ba'     mi     ni     `le  
           Taye     neg.     meet me loc.     house  
           'Taye     did not meet me in the house.'
- (55) Bibá     ni     Taye     ba'     mi     ni     `le  
           Meeting foc Taye     meet me loc     house  
           'Taye     did     meet me     in     the     house'.
- (56) Taye     yo     ba'     mi     ni     'le.  
           Taye     fut     meet me     in     house.  
           'Taye     will meet me in the house.'

This brings to mind Ansre's view (Ansre, 1973) that strings of words which do not satisfy the language's requirement of a full verb should be treated differently from full verbs in spite of the fact that they may have verb-stem counterparts which have the same phonological shape but which act as full verbs. He terms strings of words which do not act as full verbs "verbids". He is convinced that identity in phonological shape does not necessarily presuppose grammatical or lexical identity. This position is quite different from that taken by Bamgbose (1982: 9-10) who concludes that verb

morphology must take precedence over verbal function in determining verbal status in SVCs. However, not much case can be made for verbal status on the basis of morphology in Yoruba because it is an isolating language. I am almost certain that much more is going on in ba' than can possibly be undertaken in this paper. For the limitations observed in the occurrences of ba' and ba' may indicate a language's means of adapting to phonological changes that have occurred in history. Secondly, the ba' which occurs only in a SVC always conveys a benefactive notion. Therefore for the purpose of making clear distinctions, I consider ba' to be a 'verbid' because it does not occur independently in a non-SVC. However, I do not extend this view to strings of words which have the same form but different meanings when they occur in a SVC from when they occur in an independent sentence. This is because, syntactically, they are full verbs. Whatever function they now perform because of their situational adjustment in a SVC does not impinge on their primary function as verbs. In this category are strings of words like fun which means 'to give' in an initial position but meaning 'for' in a non-initial position and fi which means 'to use' in a SVC but 'put' in a simple sentence.

Another observation is about se which can be glossed as 'do' or 'make'. Se usually occurs as a verb, for instance :

(57) Taye            n        se        ise.

Taye            cont    do        work

'Taye is working.'

(58) Ṣiṣe ni Taye n ṣe iṣe.

Doing foc Taye cont do work

‘Taye is really working.’

Its occurrence in a non-initial position in a SVC will be like this :

(59) Mo lọ ṣe iṣe sin orile-ede mi.

I go do work serve head-language me

‘I went to serve my country.’

However its occurrence in examples 61 and 62 leaves me wondering whether it is a verb in these constructions:

(60) Bi o ṣe n fẹ yin ibon mọ o -----

As 3sing do cont want shoot gun meet 3sing---

‘As he was about to shoot it---.’

(61) Bi o ṣe n ṣe itoju re -----

As 3sing do cont. do care 3sing

‘As he was taking care of him’.

Ṣe in initial position in these examples precedes T/M/A contrary to the syntax of a typical Yoruba verb and can therefore be considered a ‘verbid’ in these temporal clauses.

### Negation

Negation is usually indicated by a marker which precedes the T /M/A in a simple sentence. In a Yoruba SVC negation is marked only once; the negative marker ko placed before initial verb phrase is meant to negate the whole clause, that is, it is meant

to effect a sentential negation. A constituent negation is marked by ko. However as pointed out by Bamgbose (1982: 15) there is a possibility of ambiguity in meaning in some instances when just an action is negated and not the whole sentence though a sentential negative marker is used. He uses two examples to illustrate his point :

(62) Dada ko gbe apoti lo ile  
 Dada neg carry box go house  
 'Dada did not carry box home'.

(63) Dada ko si apoti fun mi  
 Dada neg. open box give me  
 'Dada did not open the box for me.'

According to him, example 62 has two possible interpretations while example 63 has only one possible interpretation:

- (a) Example 62 could mean that Dada did not carry the box though he went home.
- (b) Example 62 could also mean that Dada carried the box but did not take it home.

This is a sentential negation, not constituent negation, therefore the focus is not on Dada *per se* but on the actions or manner being described by the verbs. In essence, the negative marker could imply the negation of any of the two verbs, meaning that the box did not get carried by Dada and as a result the box did not get home ( which was the goal of the carriage) or that the box was not taken home though carried by Dada. In terms of example 63, the only possible meaning is that Dada did not open the box. It is not possible to say that Dada opened the box but not for me, for once he opens the box it follows logically that it is opened for me. Is it possible to reconcile all these to what Sebba mentioned about coordinating and subordinating SVCs?. Could it be that

example 63 has only one possible meaning because it refers to a single action and therefore is a subordinating SVC?. On the other hand, does example 62 have two possible interpretations because it refers to several actions and is therefore a coordinating SVC? Or is something else going on in these examples? The free translation suggests that example 62 is a single action but a scrutiny of the Yoruba sentence shows that Dada is expected to first carry the box and then proceed home with it, so they can actually be viewed as two inter-related actions. For each action can take place without the other. It is therefore no surprise that since negation is marked only once in Yoruba SVC it is possible to have either action negated so that as Bamgbose has said an element of ambiguity is not far-fetched in such constructions. I therefore take example 62 as a coordinating SVC. This therefore seems to validate Sebba's hypothesis. Example 63 refers to the single action of opening the box ; therefore a negation of the whole sentence is achieved by placing the negative marker just before the first verb. In (63) also, fun is functioning as a benefactive marker while in (62) lo could be thought of as more "verb-like".

#### Subordinating SVCs in Yoruba

It is now possible to come to the conclusion that subordinating serial constructions are present in Yoruba due to a number of factors. First, because of the fact that the order in which some verbs can occur in a Yoruba SVC cannot be changed. In order not to give rise to 'nonsensical' utterances or a different meaning from the intended one, it seems plausible to consider the other verb(s ) subordinate to the first. For the order of occurrence of actions does not necessarily matter in a coordinate construction. Second, a case where a sentence cannot be sub-divided into two or more phrases while still

retaining the meaning of the sentence should be considered a case of subordination.

The corollary of this is that a negation of the sentence is effected without giving rise to any ambiguity in meaning. Let us look at a few examples and apply the test.

- (64) Mo n l<sub>o</sub> ra ounj<sub>e</sub> j<sub>e</sub>  
 I cont go buy food eat  
 'I am going to buy food to eat.'

Let us apply the test of sub-division :

- (65) Mo n l<sub>o</sub> ra ounj<sub>e</sub> ; Mo n l<sub>o</sub> j<sub>e</sub> ounj<sub>e</sub> na  
 I cont go buy food ; I cont go eat food the  
 'I am going to buy food'. , 'I am going to eat the food'.

Sub-dividing the sentence has resulted in two phrases that are different in meaning to the original, for the food to be bought does not appear to have any relationship with the food to be eaten. This is because while the first phrase is about an unrealis situation, that is, the food is not yet available to be eaten, the second refers to a food ready to be eaten. Let us have a look at another possibility :

- (66) Mo n l<sub>o</sub> ra ounj<sub>e</sub> ti emi yo j<sub>e</sub>.  
 I cont go buy food that I shall eat  
 'I am going to buy the food which I would eat.'

This is a typical alternative rendering of example 64 in Yoruba and the fact of subordination is clearly authenticated by the use of a relativizer.

The test of negation can also be applied :

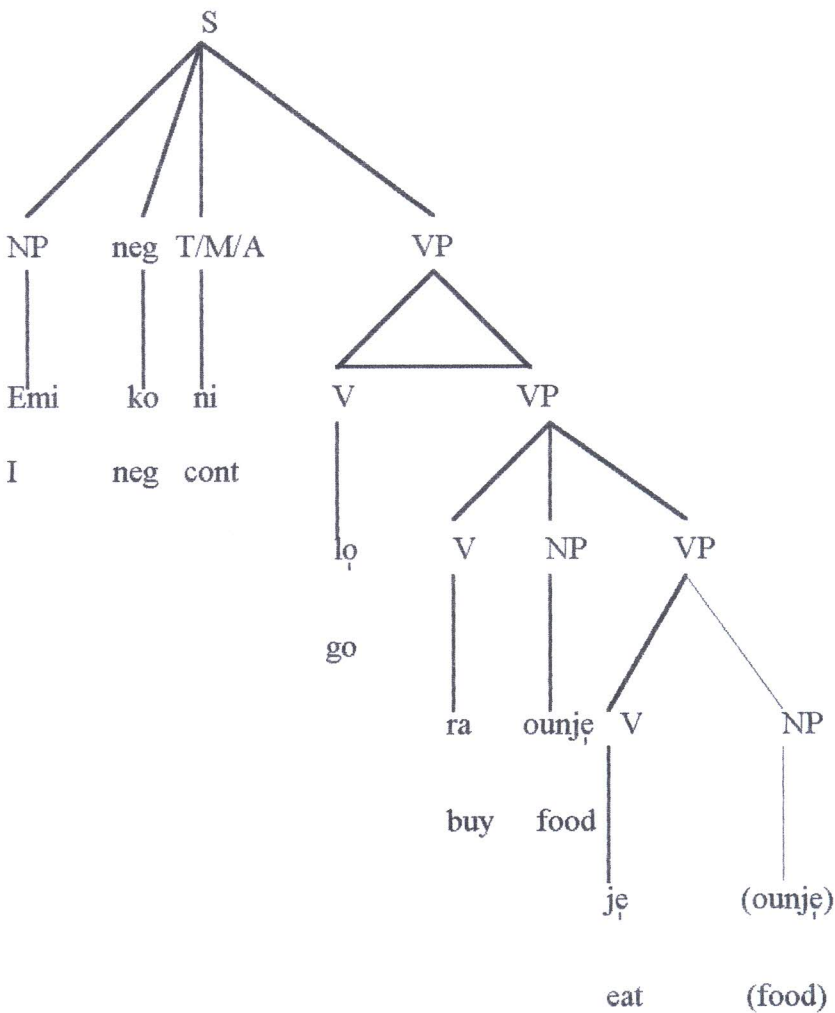
(67) Emi ko ni lo ra ounje je.

I neg cont go buy food eat

'I am not going to buy food to eat'

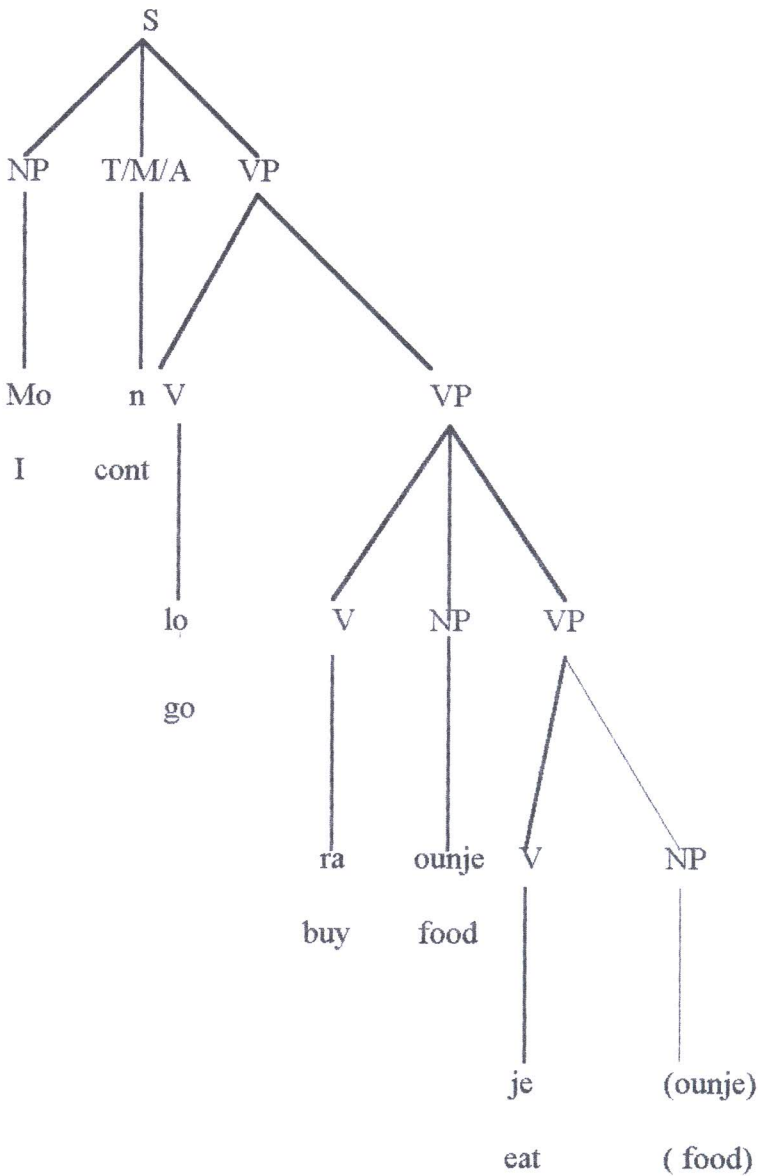
# Emi is another variant of 1sg that is more appropriately used with negation than Mo.

Since the action of buying food in example 64 is yet to be carried out, a negation of the action also effectively negates its purpose. See the structure :





Example 64 has this structure :



Example 68 is also a case of subordination :

- (68) Taye kó owo jẹ ni ẹnu iṣẹ  
 Taye gather money eat loc mouth work  
 'Taye embezzled funds at work'.

A sub-division of the sentence into two phrases will look like this :

- (69) Taye kó owo ; Taye jẹ owo ni ẹnu iṣẹ  
 Taye gather money; Taye eat money loc mouth work  
 ‘Taye gathered money’, ‘Taye #(owe) \ (won) money at work.’

# Since money is not an edible item, a Yoruba would automatically consider the other senses in which jẹ is used apart from ‘to eat’ which are ‘to win’ and ‘to owe’. It is quite obvious that the meaning of 69 is very different from the intention of the speaker of example 68 and therefore is not a case of a coordinating but a subordinating SVC.

Negating example 68 does not give rise to any ambiguity, for instance:

- (70) Taye kò kó owo jẹ ni ẹnu iṣẹ.  
 Taye neg gather money eat loc mouth work  
 ‘Taye did not embezzle money at work’.

Another example of subordination is 71 :

- (71) Mo fí ọbẹ gẹ iṣu  
 I use knife cut yam  
 ‘I cut yam with a knife’.

An attempt at sub-dividing this sentence results in :

- (72) Mo fí ọbẹ ; Mo si gẹ iṣu  
 I use knife ; I and cut yam  
 ‘I swing knife’ ; ‘And I cut yam’.

The phrases in example 72 appear quite unrelated or at best magical that is, the swinging of a knife results in the ability to cut a piece of yam because fi in this construction now has the sense of 'to swing'. This is a clear case of subordination for sub-division has resulted in an ungrammatical string or one with a meaning that is different from the intention of the original speaker of example 71.

Negation of example 71 will be like this :

- (73) Emi ko fi oḃe ge iṣu  
 I neg use knife cut yam  
 'I did not use a knife to cut yam'.

The context in which a negation occurs is crucial to the meaning that is intended. For while there is a denial of the use of a knife to cut yam, there is no outright denial that the yam was cut. In Yoruba, it is more common to negate the fact that a particular type of the instrument was used than to negate the fact that the instrument was ever used especially when there is no alternative means of accomplishing the task without the use of the instrument. Therefore, it would be more natural in Yoruba to say :

- (74) Emi ko fi oḃe yen ge iṣu  
 I neg use knife that cut yam  
 'I did not use that knife to cut yam.'

In this context, a particular instrument is being negated. However, it is noteworthy, that in negating a construction that has an instrumental marker as the first verb, the surest item that is being negated is the instrument. That is, a constituent negation rather than a sentential negation is being achieved though a sentential negative marker is used. In essence, negation is not an adequate test to determine the syntactic structure of a SVC

in Yoruba, for while example 71 is a subordinating SVC, its negation still gives rise to some ambiguity. The fact that the instrument was used is being negated, but the fact of cutting the yam was not negated. We may from this time onward not use negation as a test for it seems unhelpful in our classification of SVCs into subordinating or coordinating categories. With these examples, let us move on to what we can discover about coordinating SVCs.

#### Coordinating SVCs in Yoruba

The most basic criterion in determining what may be considered a coordinating SVC in Yoruba is that it should be possible to sub-divide the construction into conjoined phrases without any change or loss of meaning. This would be in consonance with Sebba's description that more than one action is at play. Let us look at a few examples and test the hypothesis.

- (75) Taye        ra                ounjẹ        jẹ.  
           Taye        buy                food        eat  
           'Taye bought food and ate'.

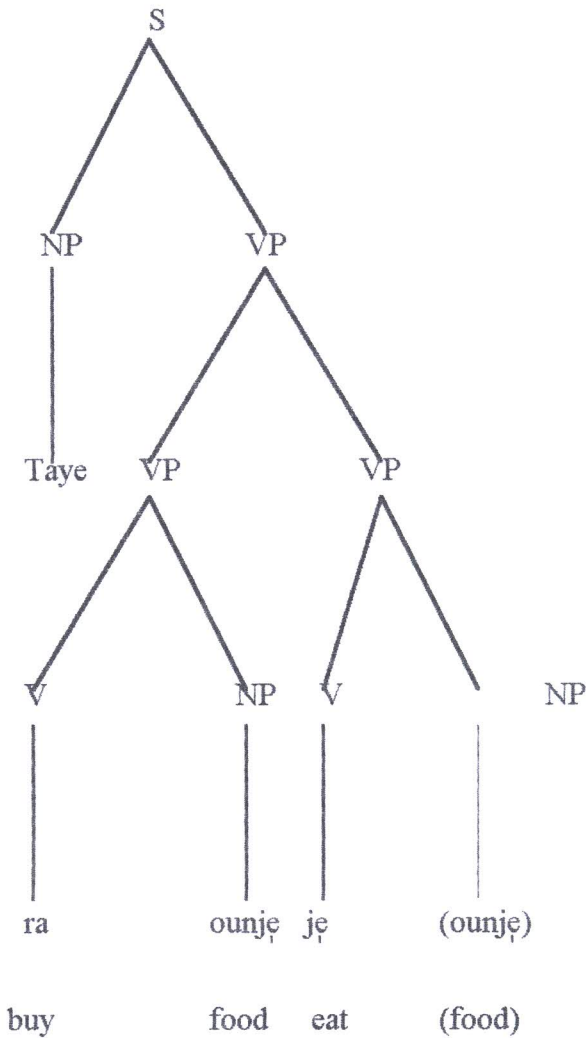
In sub-dividing the sentence, we can have :

- (76) Taye ra        ounjẹ ; Taye jẹ        ounjẹ na  
           Taye buy food ; Taye eat food the  
           'Taye ate the food he bought'.

However, a more natural construction in Yoruba would be :

- (77) Taye jẹ        ounjẹ ti        o        ra  
           Taye eat food that 3.sing buy  
           'Taye ate the food which he bought.'

A structure of example 75 will look like this :



### Conclusion

Due to the fact that Yoruba SVCs do not have much syntactic configuration, as found in some languages that accommodate conjunctions in SVCs like Sissala (Blass 1990, 250), recourse is being made to the semantic content of each to determine what structure it really has. It appears that Yoruba has more subordinating than coordinating SVCs. I have found Sebba's hypothesis very helpful in identifying subordinate and coordinate SVCs in Yoruba.

## CHAPTER 4

### THE PRAGMATICS OF SERIAL VERB CONSTRUCTIONS IN YORUBA DISCOURSE

#### Occurrence of SVCs in Yoruba Discourse

The two syntactic forms of SVC (coordinating and subordinating) can be found in a Yoruba discourse. Contrary to one's expectation that series of actions will rapidly follow one another in quick succession when the climax is reached in a narrative, therefore giving rise to SVCs, what I discovered is that actions get chunked into parts and the subject gets repeated. This slows down the reader so that attention is paid to the details leading to the climax. On the whole it was disappointing to find out that what I had thought was a pervasive occurrence in Yoruba, that is, SVCs, was not adequately reflected in the texts I looked into. Could it be that SVCs are more prevalent in spoken language than written language? Are some socio-linguistic reasons responsible for this? Is the writer's choice of stylistic device informed by other considerations? Does the availability of other literary devices like ideophones and proverbs in Yoruba minimize the use of SVCs? These interesting questions should provoke more research than this piece of work is able to address. This leads us to the whole question of alternative renderings in Yoruba. That is, what determines or constrains the choice of a writer or speaker to use a serial verb construction or otherwise?

### Pragmatic Dimensions of SVCs in Yoruba Discourse

Saeed in stating the central ideas of Katz's semantic theory says :

The relationship between a sentence and its meaning is not arbitrary and unitary. It is compositional. The way words are combined into phrases and phrases into sentences determines the meaning of the sentences (1997: 234).

However, our experiences with Yoruba SVCs have sometimes contradicted this position as the examples we have been looking at testify because

There is a gap between the semantic representations of sentences and the thoughts actually communicated ( Sperber & Wilson 1995, 9).

For instance :

(26) Baba mi fe iyawo fun mi.

Father my marry wife give me

A consideration of the lexical or semantic entries of the gloss is insufficient to access accurately the thoughts of the speaker. To a non-native speaker, this looks like the juxtaposition of two disparate phrases : "My father marry wife"; and "My father gave me", and the question arises "my father gave me what?". But to a native speaker this question does not arise, he easily fills in the necessary explicatures from the schemata in his mind and despite the 'deficiency' of the construction at being explicit, he understands that 'I' and not 'my father' is the beneficiary of the marriage, that 'my father' only procured a wife for me. SVCs with idiomatic meanings are worse off than the previous example, for instance:

(76) Taye lu mi l'enu gbo `ro

Taye beat me loc.mouth hear word

'Taye prompted me to talk'.

The meaning of this construction is far from being a compositional meaning of each verb. Indeed this is a dead metaphor that has been so constantly used that it is no longer live, for, it does not bring up in the minds of the interlocutors any images *per se*. As a metaphor, the propositional form of the utterance does not describe an actual state of affairs for it does not bear a logical resemblance to the thoughts that are being communicated. Rather it bears an interpretive resemblance to the thoughts of the speaker. All these point to the fact that meanings are deduced from inferences to the schemata in the minds of the interlocutors. As Blass says :

These expressions are dead metaphors, that is, the semantic content of the individual words is no longer consciously accessed. The hearers will access a conceptual representation directly when hearing this idiom (1990: 252).

### Some Alternative Renderings

Alternative renderings in terms of coordinating SVC-type can be formulated by conjoining two phrases. Consider the following examples :

(77) Dada gbe apoti lo ile

Dada carry box go house

'Dada carried the box home'.

(78) Dada gbe apoti, O si gbe e lo si 'le

Dada carry box, 3sing and carry it go loc house

'Dada carried the box and took it home.'



The two sentences (77) and (78) basically have similar meanings. Example 77 is used to express a predictable situation and can be found in the introductory section of a narrative discourse while example 78 slows down the reader or hearer and creates a sense of expectancy or suspense that something unusual was to happen in order to make adequate provision for conceptual accessing and to usher into the climax. (See also Blass 1990, 249-252). This however does not suggest that the likes of example 78 are found only in the climax of a story. Any occurrence of a surprise or unexpected turn of events usually employs this device. In terms of relevance theory, this is quite understandable because, with regards to example 77, a native speaker will automatically access the meaning of the utterance based on the schemata he has in his mind. Therefore, when a speaker chooses an alternative construction which chunks up the sentences into parts with the subject repeated as we have in example 78, the hearer is sufficiently alerted to expect a turn of events. To a native speaker, the processing effort is slightly increased because the contextual effects to be derived are greater than what would obtain if a serial verb construction were used.

## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSION

In the chapter two of this work, I described the verbs in Yoruba in terms of morphology, syntax and semantics. In chapter three I dealt with the description of Serial Verb Constructions with regard to its syntax and semantics. I took the findings in the area of verb-make-up and semantic structure ( one versus two actions conveyed), as a means of determining whether the constructions of the data in this work are made up of coordinate or subordinate structure. In Chapter four I basically examined the use of Yoruba SVCs in discourse, a topic many Yoruba linguists seem not to give much attention to, judging by the paucity of materials on it.

In the course of this work, attention has been drawn to bá , a particle that occurs exclusively in SVC sometimes as benefactive marker and at other times as comitative marker. It has also been found to occur as the only verb in an independent sentence, and, as I have suggested much more seems to be going on with bá which should be enough to provoke further research.

One of the issues that has cropped up in the process of describing and analyzing what takes place in Yoruba serial verb constructions is the manner in which a verb gets topicalized, for both fronting with reduplication and copying takes place which is unusual for many languages. The usual practice is either extraction or leaving a resumptive pronoun. More work may be done on this to unravel what may be going on for the pattern of reduplication is always constant (that is the reduplicated consonant is always

followed by vowel 'i'). Negation is another interesting phenomenon in Yoruba. The fact that negation is marked only once in Yoruba SVC gives rise to a lot of open-ended or ambiguous utterances. Does this suggest a problem in communication? How is such ambiguity taken care of in the language? This is another residual issue that need to be taken up for further research.

It was also observed that SVCs in Yoruba seem to have fixed occurrences and therefore fixed meanings so that meaning does not reside in the composition of each individual verb component but on the meaning assigned the construction by the community (this is much pronounced in SVCs with idiomatic meanings). This means that the meaning of a Yoruba SVC is predictable and alternative constructions are used only when the unexpected happens. This hypothesis needs further research for authentication or modification. The other observation which I made is the fact that SVCs are not prevalent in use in Yoruba written discourse. When they are found in a narrative, it does not occur in the climax. I have attributed this limited occurrence to its predictable nature at least in Yoruba : a quality which is least needed in the climax of a story.

All the above indicate that there is still a mine of treasure to be explored in Yoruba Serial Verb Constructions.

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